

Meningococcal Disease

❑ WHAT IS IT?

Meningococcal diseases are infections caused by a bacterium named *Neisseria meningitidis* (also called the meningococcus). Meningococcal disease includes serious infections of the fluid and lining surrounding the brain (meningitis), bloodstream (bacteremia and sepsis), lungs (pneumonia), and joints (arthritis).

❑ SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Sudden high fever (usually 102° F or more)
- ✓ Chills
- ✓ Severe headache
- ✓ Difficulty breathing
- ✓ Stiff neck and back
- ✓ Painful joints
- ✓ Vomiting
- ✓ Extreme sleepiness and/or confusion
- ✓ Loss of consciousness/seizures
- ✓ Rash or bluish/purple splotches.
- ✓ In babies under one year of age, the soft spot on the top of the head (fontanel) may bulge upward.

❑ HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- ✓ The bacteria is present in the noses and throats of ill persons and spread to close contacts through saliva or nose and throat secretions when talking, coughing, sneezing, kissing, etc.
- ✓ Healthy people who have no symptoms of illness sometimes carry the meningococcus in their noses and throats.
- ✓ Meningococcal infections spread by close contact (for example, among household members) and is not spread simply by being in the same room with an infected person.
- ✓ Rarely, transmission occurs by sharing eating utensils, glassware, cigarettes, or toothbrushes.
- ✓ It takes 1 to 10 days from the time a person is exposed to the bacteria for symptoms to occur.

❑ DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- ✓ People with meningococcal disease frequently require hospitalization.
- ✓ The infection is diagnosed by testing the patient's blood or spinal fluid.
- ✓ All people who have had close contact with someone with meningococcal disease should:
 - 1) Be prescribed an antibiotic medicine by their health care provider as soon as possible to help prevent meningococcal disease.
 - 2) Watch for symptoms of meningococcal disease for 10 days after last contact with the ill person, even if they took antibiotics to prevent infection.
 - 3) Contact their health care provider right away if they develop fever, headache or other symptoms described on this sheet.

❑ PREVENTION

- ✓ Vaccination: Beginning in 2005, a vaccine to protect against meningococcal disease is available for persons between 11 and 55 years of age. The vaccine is recommended for young adolescents (age 11-12 years), college freshmen living in dormitory-style housing, and others at increased risk for meningococcal disease (contact your health care provider or local public health agency for more information).
- ✓ Vaccine may also be used by public health authorities in certain outbreak settings
- ✓ Avoid close contact with persons with respiratory infections (who are coughing and sneezing)
- ✓ Avoid sharing food, drinks, cigarettes, or eating utensils.
- ✓ Wash hands before and after eating and after

Report all cases immediately to the Health Department by calling (206) 296 - 4774.

coughing or sneezing.